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TEACHING MATERIALS FOR THE PRESENT PERFECT

No textbook is likely to provide the teacher with enough practice material. The situation is perhaps most acute in those lessons that deal with the present perfect, one of the most psychologically complex in the English tense system.

It is our hope that the following will be of direct use to the teacher, either as already-prepared material that he or she might photocopy, or as prompts for developing home-produced material tailor-made to the needs, level and age of the class in question.

Most materials and ideas were originally designed for use with "Streamline English: Departures", although there is of course no reason why they should not be used in one form or another with any textbook. It is our experience that students need to be given a clear and straightforward account of the various aspects of the present perfect, which in the final stages should be brought together to form an overview. We should like to suggest the following division (the numbers in brackets will be used in the discussion to obviate lengthy repetition):

- 0 The simple past, not the present perfect, is used to refer to definite finished events in the past.
- 1 Just-completed actions ("just" is often used as a "signal word") are expressed with the present perfect.
- 2 On-going processes (journey, the "journey of life" etc.) use the present perfect. (Signal words might be: "already", "not yet" "yet?", "ever?")
- 3 The results of past actions, if still perceptible, are described by the present perfect.
- 4 On-going actions or states ("since", "for") are described by the present perfect.

We should like to make clear that these possible elements do not exist as discrete units, but link up to form a common concept. The division is made simply in order to clarify the various idea- constituents inherent in the tense. Also, that American English does not always adhere to these points as closely as British English: we have simply chosen to adopt British English, with its more rigorous requirements in this case, as our standard.

"Departures" Units 61, 62, 65, 66, 67, 71, 75 and 77 are primarily concerned with presenting the present perfect in all its aspects. We would like to suggest the following pattern:

Unit 61 (1)

Unit 62 (1; with specific reference to "have been/gone to X")

Unit 65 (2; journey)

Unit 66 (2; journey, plus events occurring on the journey)

Unit 67 (2; "journey of life")

Unit 71 (2; "journey of life")

Unit 75 (4)

Unit 77 (synthesis)

Since no unit in particular illustrates Aspect 3 we would suggest that relevant material is inserted between Unit 71 and 75.

Aspect O

The teacher should make clear that in deciding between simple past and present perfect, the definite finished time requirement will immediately eliminate present perfect use. This decision-making process will be mentioned later in our discussion and examples of materials.

A useful game for forcing decision-making on tense is the Word and Structure Generator. This activity is based on the children's game known in Britain as Battleships. Each student is given, or draws, a matrix of four by four squares, making sixteen squares in all. Each column is labelled "work", "be", "eat" and "wash" and each line "since Monday", "yesterday", "yet" and "at nine o'clock". The game is played in pairs, with a screen of some sort erected between the partners. Each player enters six crosses in six random squares. The object of the game is to locate all the crosses.

Player A begins. He or she, guessing at a cross in line two/column two, constructs a question using the verb "to be" and the word "yesterday" - e.g. Player A asks: "Were you in Budapest yesterday?" Player B answers "yes" or "no". In the event of a negative answer Player A draws a small circle in the corresponding box in his/her matrix as a reminder that this question has been asked. If the answer is positive, he/she draws a circle with a cross in it, to indicate a direct "hit", then asks a further question.

Player B asks "Have you washed since Monday?", for instance, and so the game continues till one player has located all six of his/her opponent's crosses.

Aspect 1

Full-page magazine pictures are often very suitable as the basis for flashcards that illustrate actions which have obviously been just completed.: a bullet, for instance, caught in slow motion after shattering a sheet of glass, or a smouldering cigarette stub in an ashtray. Note that this aspect often (though not necessarily, since some results may be perceived long after the originating action) relates to aspect three. The link can be made clear by using the very same flashcards to illustrate this.

Smaller pictures, mounted on card, might be used as the basis for a game-like activity. The class is divided into groups of around six students. Each student receives a card depicting an action that has clearly just been completed. He or she describes what is to be seen in the picture without using any verb except "to be". For example, "There's a woman in front of a table, She's in a chair. There's an empty glass on the table." The next student to the right of the card holder is allowed to guess the just-completed action; the word "just" should be included in the question ("Has she just drunk something?") If he or she fails to guess correctly the next student in the circle tries to identify the action.

Aspect 2

The idea of a journey on which one is embarked provides a vivid interdiction to the second aspect of present perfect use. A blackboard introduction diagram of this type should make it clear:




already / már not yet / még nem

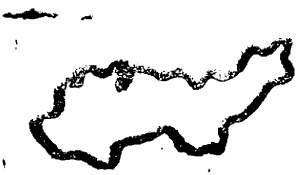

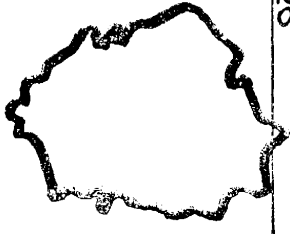
Students produce statements of the type "I'm now in C. I've already been to B. I haven't been to D yet." (Incorporating the "signal word" in the utterance helps to cement the concept.)

Split the class up into small groups and ask them to decide which towns a party of American tourists would find most interesting. Discuss the class's ideas and enter the places on a map of Hungary already drawn on an overhead transparency. With the help of the class, join up the towns to form a logical itinerary. Imagining that the proposed

tour requires one week, enter days of the week on the map with the actual day somewhere in the middle. If the group made the tour this week, where would they have already been, where would they have not been yet? What might they have already seen and done and what have they not done yet?

A contrastive tense activity on similar lines is reproduced below. Two students sit together, each with a different questionnaire. The aim is to find out which of the countries shown either, neither or both the students have been to, and which person went to which country first. So questioning will take the form "Have you been to Bulgaria?" "Yes." "When did you go?" "I went in 1990." Note that in spite of the rather stilted nature of this dialogue, it would defeat the object of the exercise to answer in the more usual abbreviated form.

COUNTRY	Your name	Part-ner's name
	N in 0	N in 0
	N in 0	N in 0
	N in 0	N in 0

COUNTRY	Your name	Part-ner's name
	N in 0	N in 0
	N in 0	N in 0
	N in 0	N in 0

Let's return to our transparency showing a tourist itinerary around Hungary. This representation of the "journey aspect" of the present perfect allows us to make a convenient bridge with the "journey of life". Erase the names of the towns and the days of the week, leaving only the itinerary, split into past and future. What events have most of the students experienced in their lives? Enter three or four of them chronologically in place of already-visited towns. What events might they experience in the rest of their lives? Write three or four of these in place of those towns which have yet to be visited. Which of these events have been experienced by which students?

Further partner work might take the form of sets of picture cards depicting events in a person's life. These may be most conveniently made out of a collection of photocopied drawings mounted on file cards so that each set is identical; to distinguish the sets the rear side of those cards in any one set should be marked with an identifying colour.

In pairs, students sort out those actions which both of them have already experienced and those neither of them have experienced, so that at the end of the game they have two piles of cards and a heap of "rejects" (experiences of one student but not the other).

So as to encourage genuine communication, a screen should be erected between the participants, the cards shared between them, and each should ask the other questions along these lines: "Have you ever smoked a cigarette?", the card in question being designated to one pile or the other depending on the other's response.

Aspect 3

Picture work is especially suitable for describing the results of past actions which may still be seen.

For instance, two pictures -- drawings or actual photos -- of a high street might be used to elicit utterances of the type "They've pulled down the little grocer's and built a supermarket." A house before and after renovation might draw the comment "They've put in central heating." A recently vacated living-room could produce "The owner's smoked a cigarette or two, has left a magazine open on the table."

We have found especially useful a sheet of line drawings depicting ambiguous situations, e.g. a man digging a hole with a sack on the ground beside him. Has he robbed a bank and is now hiding the loot? Has he found the sack in the hole? Has his pet passed to the Happy Hunting Ground and is he burying it? If students are given time to prepare their answers to such a sheet of pictures (i.e. if they are set the task for homework), a lot

of interesting suggestions will be generated. The fact that a problem-solving element is involved makes the operation more satisfying.

A game to practise this aspect of present perfect use might equally well be used to practise the "just" aspect.

Make six line drawings, 2,5 cm x 4 cm, each depicting the result of a recent action. These might include: a table seen from above with playing cards on it; a bathroom with water coming out from under the door; an ashtray full of cigarette butts; a telephone off the hook; an open cupboard; a pop record half replaced in its sleeve; a steaming kettle; a TV that has just been switched off (there is a glow in the centre of the tube showing that it was in use until a moment ago). Photocopy these six times. Fill an A4 sheet of paper with six 9 cm x 9 cm boxes. Subdivide these boxes into six. Stick any six of the above pictures into the small boxes, so that there are three identical pairs which are distinguished from the other in one or more drawings. (Note, the pictures should be different so that students cannot simply "read off" the contents of their cards in order. The master sheet is photocopied so that there are as many boxes of six pictures as there are students. These are distributed to the class. Students now try to "find their partner" - that is, to find another person who has done precisely the actions that he/she has done. When partners have found each other they stand together at the front of the room and wait for the others to finish.

Aspect 4

The use of the simple form of the present perfect is rather unusual for describing on-going actions, especially for those that indicate emotional involvement. The first of the following partner activities, however, involves factual questions about the length of time third persons have worked for British Airways. Pairs of students, with a screen between them, exchange information from their A/B sheets ("How long has x worked for the airline?" "She's worked for five years/since 1986"). Data gained in this way is entered in the empty spaces on each student's paper. The aim of the activity is to find the employee who has worked the longest and the shortest time.

The second activity is a questionnaire and is also intended for partner work. It might also be used (more appropriately) to practise the continuous form of the tense. Once again, the partners work together, one receiving the "At School" slip and the other the "At Home". The aim is to establish which student has done these things longest.

a t s c h o o l	HOW LONG?		
		you	your parter
	learn at present school?		
	read books in English?		
	study English?		
	play (football) in the school team?		

a t h o m e	HOW LONG?		
		you	your parter
	ride present bike?		
	listen to your favourite pop group		
	follow your favourite hobby?		
	live in your present house/flat?		

In the final phase it is essential to stress two factors. Firstly, that the stating of a definite finished time precludes present perfect use. Secondly that in the final analysis the present perfect is to be seen as encapsulating a certain psychological perception of past states and actions rather than being a haphazard conglomeration of rules and trigger words.